SCATTERGOOD BORROWS A GRANDMOTHER

By Clarence Buddington Kelland

THE world has come to think of Scattergood Baines as an astute and perhaps tricky business man, or as the political despot of a state. Because this is so it has overlooked or neglected many stories about the man much more indicative of character, and more fascinating of detail than those well known and often-repeated tales of his sagacity in trading or his readiness in outwitting a political enemy.

Scattergood loved to meddle. Perhaps that is his dominant trait. He could see nothing moving in the community about him and withhold his hand. It would be difficult to find a pie in Coldriver which was not marked by his thumb. So it came about that when he became convinced that Grandmother Penny was unhappy because of various restrictions and inhibitions placed on her by her son, the dry goods merchant, and by her daughter-in-law, he determined to intervene. Scattergood was partial to old ladies, and this partiality can be traced to his earliest days in Coldriver. He loved white hair and wrinkled cheeks and eyes that had once been youthful and glowing, but were dulled and dimmed by watching the long procession of the years.

Now he sat on the piazza of his hardware store, his shoes on the planking beside him, and is pudgy toes wriggling like the trained fingers of an eminent pianist. It was a knotty problem. An ordinary problem Scattergood could solve with shoes on feet, but let the matter take on eminent difficulty and his toes must be given freedom and elbow room, as one might say. Later in life his wife, Mandy, after he had married her, tried to cure him of this habit, which she considered vulgar, but at this point she failed signally.

The facts about Grandmother Penny were not that she was consciously ill-treated. Her bodily comfort was seen to. She was well fed and reasonably clothed, and had a good bed in which to sleep. Where she was sinned against was in this: That her family looked upon her white hair and her wrinkles and arrived at the erroneous conclusion that her interest in life was gone—in short, that she was content to cumber the earth and to wait for the long sleep. To them she was simply one who tarries and is content.

Scattergood looked into her sharp, old eyes, eyes that were capable of sudden gleams of humor or flashes of anger, and he knew. He knew that death seemed as distant to Grandmother Penny as it had seemed fifty years ago. He knew that her interest in life was as keen, her yearning to participate in the affairs of life as strong, as they had been when Grandfather Penny—now long gone to his reward—had driven his horse over the hills with one hand while he utilized the other arm for more important and delightful purposes.

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SCATTERGOOD was remembering his own grandmother. He had known her as no other living soul had known her because she had been his boyhood intimate, his defender, always his advocate, and because the boyish love which he had given her had made his eyes keen to perceive. He was regretting that in his thoughtless youth he had failed to accomplish more to make gladder his grandmother's few remaining years.

"I calc'late," said Scattergood to himself—but aloud—"that I'll kind of substitute Grandmother Penny for Grandma Baines—pervidin' Grandma Baines is fixed so's she kin see; more'n likely she'll understand what I'm up to, and it'll tickle her—I'm goin' to up and borrow me a grandmother."

He wriggled his toes and considered. What thing had his grandmother most desired?

"Independence was what she craved," he said, and considered the point. "She didn't want to be beholdin' to folks. She wanted to be fixed so's she could do as she pleased, and nobody to interfere. I calc'late if Grandma Baines'd 'a' been left alone sh'd 'a' found her another husband and they'd 'a' had a home of their own with all the fixin's. It wasn't so much doin' that grandma wanted, it was knowin' she could do if she wanted to."

Scattergood's specially reinforced chair creaked as he strained forward to pick up his shoepacs and draw them on. It required no small exertion, and he straightened up, red of face and panting a trifle. He walked up the street, crossed the bridge and descended to the little room under the barber shop, where the checker or cribbage championship of the state was decided daily. Two ancient citizens were playing checkers, while a third stood over them, watching with that thrilled concentration with which the ordinary person might watch an only son essaying to cross Niagara falls on a tight rope. Scattergood knew better than to interrupt the game, so he stood by until, by a breath-taking triple jump, Old Man Bogle sent his antagonist down to defeat. Then, and only then, did Scattergood speak to the old gentleman who had been the spectator.

"Mornin', Mr. Spackles," he said.

"Mornin', Scattergood. See that last jump of Bogle's? I swanny if 'twan't about as clever a move as I see this year."

"Mr. Spackles," said Scattergood, "I come down here to find out could I ask you some advice. You bein' experienced like you be, it 'peared to me like you was the one man that could help me out."

"Um!——" grunted Mr. Spackles, his old blue eyes widening with the distinction of the moment. "If I kin be of any service to you I calc'late I'm willin'. 'Tain't often folks comes to me for advice any more, or anythin' else, for that matter. Guess they figger I'm too old to 'mount to anythin'."

"Feel like takin' a mite of a walk?"

"Who? Me? I'm skittisher'n a colt this mornin'. Bet I kin walk twenty mile 'fore sundown."

They moved toward the door, but there Mr. Spackles paused to look back grandly upon the checker players. "Sorry I can't linger to watch you, boys," he said loftily, "but they's important matters me and Scattergood got to discuss. Seems like he's feelin' the need of sound advice."

When they were gone the checker players scrutinized each other, and then with one accord scrambled to the door and started out after Scattergood and Mr. Spackles.

"I swanny!" said Old Man Bogle.

"What d' you figger Scattergood wanted of that ol' coot?" demanded Old Man Peterson.

"Somethin' deep," hazarded Old Man Bogle. "I always did hold Spackles was a brainy cuss. Hain't he 'most as good a checker player as I be? What gits me, though, is how Scattergood come to pick him instid of me."

"Huh!" grunted Old Man Peterson, and they resumed their game.

Scattergood walked along in silence for a few paces; then he regarded Mr. Spackles appraisingly.

"Mr. Spackles," said he deferentially, "I dunno when I come acrost a man that holds his years like you do. Mind if I ask you jest how old you be?"

"Sixty-six year," said Spackles.

"Wouldn't never 'a' b'lieved it," marveled Scattergood. "Wouldn't 'a' set you down for a day more'n fifty-five or six, not with them clear eyes and them ruddy cheeks and the way you step out."

"Calc'late to be nigh as good as I ever was, Scattergood. J'nts creak some, but what I got inside my head it don't never creak none to speak of."

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"WHAT I want to ask you, Mr. Spackles," said Scattergood, "is if you calc'late a man that's got to be past sixty and a woman that's got to be past sixty has got any business hitchin' up and marryin' each other."

"Um! Depends. I'd say it depends. If the feller was perserved like I be, and the woman was his equal in mind and body, I'd say they was no reason ag'in it—'ceptin' it might be money."

"Ever think of marryin' yourself, Mr. Spackles?"

"Figgered some. Figgered some. But knowed they wasn't no use. Son and daughter wouldn't hear to it. Couldn't support a wife, nohow. Son and daughter calc'lates to be mighty kind to me. Scattergood, and gives me dum near all I kin ask, but both of 'em says I got to the time of life where it hain't becomin' in 'em to allow me to work.

"How much kin sich a couple as I been talkin' about live on?"

"When I married forty-odd year ago I was gittin' a dollar a day. Me'n' ma we done fine and saved money. Livin's higher now. Calc'late it 'u'd take nigh a dollar 'n' a half to get on comfortable."

"Figger fifty dollars a month 'u'd do it? Think that 'u'd be enough?"

"Scattergood, you listen here to me. I hain't never earned as much as fifty dollar a month reg'lar in my whole life—and I got consid'able pleasure out of livin', too."

They had walked up the street until they were passing the Penny residence. Grandmother Penny was sitting on the porch, knitting as usual. She looked very neat and dainty as she sat there in her white lace cap and her lavender dress.

"Fine-lookin' old lady," said Scattergood.

Mr. Spackles regarded Grandmother Penny and nodded with the air of a connoisseur. "Dum'd if she hain't." He lifted his hat and yelled across the road, "Mornin', Ellen."

"Mornin', James," replied Grandmother Penny, and bobbed her head. "Won't you folks stop and set? Sun's a-comin' down powerful hot."

"Don't mind if we do," said Scattergood. He seated himself, and mopped his brow, and fanned himself with his broad straw hat, whose flapping brim was beginning to ravel about the edges. Presently he stood up.

"Got to be movin' along, Mis' Penny. Seems like I'm mighty busy off and on. But I dunno what I'd do without Mr. Spackles, here, to advise me once in a while. He's jest been givin' me the benefit of his thinkin' this mornin'."

With inward satisfaction Scattergood noticed how the old lady turned a pert, sharp look upon Mr. Spackles, regarding him with awakened interest. To be considered a man of wisdom by Scattergood Baines was a distinction in Cold River even in those days, and for a man actually to be consulted and asked for advice by the ample hardware merchant was to lift him into an intellectual class to which few could aspire.

"I hope he gin you good advice, Scattergood," said Grandmother Penny

"Allus does. If ever you're lookin' for level-headedness and f'r a man you kin depend on, jest send a call for Mr. Spackles. G'by, ma'am. B'by, Mr. Spackles, and much 'bleeged to you."

Mr. Spackles was a little bewildered, for he had not the least idea upon what subject he had advised Scattergood, but he was of an acuteness not to pass by any of the advantage that accrued from the situation. He replied, with lofty kindness, "Any time you want for to consult with me, young man, jest come right ahead."

When Scattergood was gone, Mr. Spackles turned to the old lady and waggled his head.

"Ellen, that there's a mighty promisin' young man. Time's comin' when he's a-goin' to amount to suthin.' I'm a-calc'latin' on guidin' him all I kin."

"I want to know," said Grandmother Penny, almost breathless at this new importance of Mr. Spackles, and Mr. Spackles basked in her admiration, and added to it by apochryphal narratives of his relations with Scattergood.

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FOR a week Scattergood let matters rest. He was cantent, for more than once he saw Mr. Spackles' faded overalls and ragged hat on the Penny premises, and watched the old gentleman in animated conversation with Grandmother Penny, who seemed to be perter and brighter and handsomer than she had ever seemed before.

On one such day Scattergood crossed the street and entered the gate.

"Howdy, folks?" he said. "Wonder if I can speak with Mr. Spackles without interferin'?"

"Certainly you kin," said Grandmother Penny, cordially.

"Got a important bankin' matter over to the county seat. Mr. Spackles, and I was wonderin' if I could figger on your help?"

"To be sure you kin, Scattergood. To be sure."

"Got to have brainy men over there day after tomorrow. B'jing! that's circus day, too. Didn't think of that till this minnit. Wonder if you'd drive my horse and buggy over and fix up a deal with the president of the bank?"

"Glad to 'bleege," said the flattered Mr. Spackles.

"Circus day," Scattergood repeated. "Been to a circus lately, Mis' Penny?"

"Hain't seen one for years."

"No?—Mr. Spackles, what be you thinkin' of? To be sure. Why, you kin bundle this Mis' Penny into the buggy and take her along with you! Finish the business in no time, bein' spry like you be, and then you and her kin take in the circus and the side show, and stay f'r the concert. How's that?"

Mr. Spackles was suddenly red and embarrassed, but Grandmother Penny beamed.

"Why," says she, "makes me feel like a youny girl ag'in. To be sure I'll go. Daughter'll make a fuss, but I jest don't care if she does. I'm a'goin'."

"That's the way to talk," said Scattergood. "Mr. Spackles'll be round f'r you bright and early. Now, if you kin spare him, I calc'late we got to talk business."

When they were in the street Mr. Spackles chocked and caughed, and said with some vexation:

"You went and got me in f'r it that time."

"How so, Mr. Spackles? Don't you want to take Mis' Penny to the circus?"

"Course I do, but circuses cost money. I hain't got more'n a quarter to my name."

"H'm! Didn't cal'late I was askin' you to take a day of your time for nothin', did you? F'r a trip like this here, with a lot hangin' on to it, I'd say ten dollars was about the fittin' pay. What say?"

Mr. Spackles' beaming face was answer enough.

Grandmother Penny and Mr. Spackles went to the circus in a more or less surreptitious manner. It was a wonderful day, a successful day, such a day as neither of them had expected ever to see again, and when they drove home through the moonlight, across the mountains, their souls were no longer the souls of threescore and ten, but of two-score and one.

"Great day, wa'n't it, Ellen?" said Mr. Spackles, softly.

"Don't call to mind nothin' approachin' it, James."

"You be powerful good comp-ny, Ellen."

"So be you, James."

"I calc'late to come and set with you, often," said James, diffidently.

"Whenever the notion strikes you, James," replied Grandmother Penny, and she blushed for the first time in a score of years.

Two days later Pliny Pickett stopped to speak to Scattergood in front of the hardware store. Pliny supplemented and amplified the weekly newspaper, and so was very useful to Baines.

"Hear tell Ol' Man Spackles is sparkin' Grandmother Penny," Pliny said, with a grin. "Don't figger nothin' 'll come of it, though. Their children won't allow it."

"Won't allow it, eh? What's the reason? What business is't of theirn?"

"Have to support 'em. The ol' folks hain't got no money. Spackles' got two-three hundred laid by for to bury him, and so's Grandmother Penny. Seems like ol' folks allus lays by for the funeral, but that's every red cent they got. I hear tell Mis' Penny's son has forbid Sprackles comin' around the house."

This proved to be the fact, as Scattergood learned from no less an authority than Mr. Spackles himself.

"Felt like strikin' him right there'n' then," said Mr. Spackles, heatedly, "but I seen 'twouldn't do to abuse one of Ellen's children."

"Um!" Was you and Grandmother Penny figgerin' on hitchin' up?" Scattergood asked.

"I put the question," said Mr. Spackles, with the air of a youth of twenty, "and Ellen up and allowed she'd have me. But I guess 'twon't never come off now. Seems like I'll never be content ag'in, and Ellen's that downcast I shouldn't be a mite s'prised if she jest give up and passed away."

"Difficulty's money, hain't it? Largely financial, eh?"

"Ya-as."

"Folks has got rich before. Maybe somethin' like that'll happen to you."

"Have to happen mighty suddin, Scattergood, if it aims to do any good in this world."

"I've knowed men to invest a couple hundred dollars into some venture and come out at t'other end with thousands. You got couple hundred, hain't you?"

"Ellen and me both has—saved up to bury us."

"Um! Git buried, anyhow. Law compels it. Doggone little pleasure spendin' money f'r your own coffin. More sensible to git some good out of it. I'm goin' away to the city f'r a week or such a matter. When I come back we'll kind of thrash things out and see what's to be done. Meantime, don't you and Grandmother Penny up and elope."

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IN this manner Scattergood planted the get-rich-quick idea in the head of Mr. Spackles, who communicated it to Grandmother Penny in the course of a clandestine meeting. The old folks discussed it, and hope made it seem more and more plausible to them. Realizing the fewness of the days remaining to them, they were anxious to utilize every moment. It was Grandmother Penny who was the daring spirit. She was for drawing their money out of the bank that very day and investing it somehow, somewhere, in the hope of seeing it come back to them a hundred-fold.

Scattergood had neglected to take into consideration Grandmother Penny's adventuresome spirit; he had also neglected to avail himself of the information that a certain Mr. Baxter, registered from Boston, was at the hotel, and that his business was selling shares of stock in a mine which did not exist to gullible folks who wanted to become wealthy without spending any labor in the process. He did a thriving business. It was Coldriver's first experience with this particular method of extracting money from the public, and it came to the front handsomely. Mr. Spackles got wind of the opportunity and told it to Grandmother Penny. She took charge of affairs, compelled her fiance to go with her to the bank, where they withdrew their savings, and then sought for Mr. Baxter, who, in return for a bulk sum of some $500, sold them enough stock in the mine to paper the parlor. Also, he promised them enormous returns in an exceedingly brief space of time. Their profit on the transaction would, he assured them, be not less than $10,000, and might amount to double that sum. They departed in a state of extreme elation, and but for Mr. Spackles' conservatism Grandmother Penny would have eloped with him then and there.

"I'd like to, Ellen. I'd like to, mighty well, but 'tain't safe. Le's git the money fust. The minnit the money comes in, off we mog to the parson. But 'tain't safe yit. Jest hold your hosses."

When Scattergood returned and was visible again on the piazza of his hardware store, it was not long before the village financiers came to him boasting of their achievement. He, Scattergood, was not the only man in town with the ability to make money. No, indeed, and for proof of it here were the stock certificates, purchased from a deluded young man for a few cents a share, when common sense told you they were worth many, many dollars. Scattergood listened to two or three without a word. Finally, he asked:

"How many folks went into this here thing?"

"Sev'ral. Sev'ral. Near's I kin figger, folks here bought nigh five thousand dollars wuth of stock off'n Baxter. Must 'a' been fifty or sixty went into the deal."

"Dum fools," said Scattergood, with sudden wrath. "Has it got so's I don't dast to leave town without you folks messin' things up? Can't I leave overnight and find things safe in the morning? You hain't got the sense Gawd gave field mice—the whole kit and b'lilin' of you. Serves you dum well right, tryin' to git somethin' f'r nothin'. Now git away f'm here. Don't pester me. You've been swindled, that's what, and it serves you doggone well right. Now git."

It was one of the few times that Coldriver saw Scattergood in a rage. The rage convinced them. Scattergood said they were swindled and he was in a rage. Therefore he must be right. The news spread, and knots of citizens with lowered heads and anxious eyes gathered on street corners and whispered and nodded toward Scattergood, who sat heavily on his piazza, speaking to nobody. It was Grandmother Penny who dared accost him. She crept up to his place and said, tremulously:

"Be you sure, Scattergood, about that feller bein' a swindler?"

Scattergood looked down at her fiercely. Then his eyes softened and he leaned forward and scrutinized her face.

"Did you git into this mess, too, Grandmother Penny?"

"Both me 'n' James," she said. "You let on that folks got rich quick by investin'. Me 'n' James was powerful anxious to git money so's—so's we could git married on it. So we drawed out our money and—and invested it."

"Come here, Grandmother," said Scattergood, and she stood just before his chair, her head coming very little higher than his own as he sat there, big and ominous. "So, the skunk took your money, too. I hain't carin' a whoop for them others. They got what was comin' to 'em, and I didn't calc'late to do nothin'. But you! By crimminy! Wa-al, Grandmother, you go off home and knit. I'll look into things. It's on your account, and not on theirs." He shook his head fiercely toward the town. "But I calc'late I'll have to get theirn back, too. And, Grandmother, you a'd James kin rest easy. Hain't sayin' no more. Jest wait, and don't worry, and don't say nothin' to nobody. G'-bye, Grandmother Penny. G'-bye."

That evening Scattergood drove out of Coldriver in his rickety buggy. Nobody dared to speak to him, but, nevertheless, he carried in his pocket a list of the town's investors in mining stock, together with the amounts of their investments. He was not seen again for several days.

Two days later Scattergood appeared in the lobby of the Mansion House, in the county seat. He scrutinized the register, and found, to his satisfaction, that a Mr. Bowman of Boston was occupying room 106. Mr. Bowman had signed the hotel register in Coldriver as Mr. Baxter, also of Boston. Scattergood seated himself in a chair and lighted one of the cigars which made his presence so undesirable in an inclosed space. He appeared to be taking a nap.

Fifteen minutes after Scattergood began to nod, Sam Bangs, a politician with some strength in the rural districts, came down the stairs in company with a young man of prepossessing appearance, and clothing which did not strike the beholder as either too gaudy or too stylish. Indeed, the young man impressed the world as being a sober, conservative person, in whose judgment it would be well to place confidence.

When Bangs saw Scattergood he stopped and whispered a moment to his companion, who nodded. They approached Scattergood, and Bangs touched him on the shoulder.

"Mr. Baines," he said, "I want you should meet my friend, Mr. Bowman. Mr. Bowman's a broker. Been buyin' some stocks off'n him or calc'late to. I knowed you done consid'able investin', so I took the liberty."

Scattergood looked drowsily at the young man. "Set," he said. "Set and have a cigar."

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THE young Mr. Bowman accepted the cigar, but, after a glance at it, thrust it into his mouth unlighted. The conversation began with national politics, swung to crops, and veered finally to the subject of investments. Mr. Bowman, backed in his statements by Mr. Bangs, spoke to Scattergood of a certain mine whose stock could be had for a song, but whose riches in mineral, about to be reached by a certain shaft or drift or tunnel, were fabulous. Scattergood was interested. An appointment was made for further discussion.

The appointment was kept that evening, in the same lobby, and Mr. Bowman, while finding more than ordinary difficulty in convincing this fat country merchant, did, eventually succeed in bringing him to a point of enthusiasm.

"Looks good," said Scattergood. "Calc'late a feller could make a killin'. I'm a-goin' into it hair, hide and hoofs. Figger me f'r not less'n five thousand dollars' wuth of it. Ought to make me fifty thousand if it makes a cent."

"You're conservative, Mr. Baines, conservative."

"Always calc'lated to be, Mr. Bowman." He looked up as a middle-aged man with a drooping mustache approached. "Howdy, John? Still workin' f'r the express company, be you?"

"Calc'late to, Mr. Baines. Got charge of the local office. 'Tain't all pleasure, neither. In a sight of trouble this minnit."

"I want to know," said Scattergood. "Stand to lose my job," said John, sadly. "Dunno where I'll find me another."

"What you been doin', eh? What got you in bad?"

"One of the dummed gold shipments from the state bank. Hadn't ought to speak about it, 'cause the comp'ny's bein' awful secret. Hain't lettin' it out." He glanced apprehensively at Mr. Bowman.

"Needn't to be afraid of Mr. Bowman, John. What's the story?"

"Bank shippin' bullion. Three chunks of it. Wuth fifty-odd thousand dollars, I know, 'cause that's the comp'ny's liability wrote in black and white. Been stole," he said, after a brief pause.

"Where?"

"Out of my office, this mornin'. Not a trace. Jest up and disappeared. Detectives and all can't run on to no clue. Might as well 'a' melted and run through a crack. Jest gone, and that's all anybody kin find."

"Mighty sorry to hear it, John. Hope you wasn't keerless, and don't figger you was. Guess you won't be blamed when the facts comes out."

"If they ever do," said John. "G'night, Mr. Baines. I'm mighty oneasy in my mind."

Scattergood turned the subject back at once to mining stocks.

"You set me down for five thousand dollars. Don't let nobody else have it. Got jest that sum comin' due tomorrer. You and me'll drive over to git it, and you fetch them stock certificates along. Got 'em in that little satchel you're always carryin'?"

"No," smiled Mr. Bowman. "That's my purse. I take no chances on robbers, like your express agent spoke of, I don't mind telling you that I have fifteen thousand dollars in that bag—and I intend to keep it there."

"Do tell!" exclaimed Scattergood. "Wa-al, you know your business. Now, then, if you want to drive over six mile with me tomorrer, we'll git us that money and I'll take the stock."

"Good," said Mr. Bowman. "An early start. Can I take a train from there? I'll be through here, I think."

"To be sure," said Scattergood. "Mighty funny thing about that gold, now wa'n' it? Three bars. Wuth fifty thousand! Mighty slick work—to spirit it off and nobody never find a trace."

"The criminal classes," said Mr. Bowman, "have produced some remarkable intellects. Good night, Mr. Baines."

"See you early in the morning," replied Scattergood.

After a breakfast, which Mr. Bowman watched Scattergood dispose of with admiration and astonishment, the pair entered the old buggy and started across the hills. In addition to his small bag Mr. Bowman brought a large suitcase containing his apparel, so it was apparent he was leaving the county seat for good. The morning came off hot and humid. Scattergood kept his eyes open for a spring, but it was not until they had driven some miles that an opportunity to find water appeared.

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"CALC'LATE we kin git a drink there," said Scattergood, pointing to a little shanty in a clearing by the roadside. He stopped his horse, and they alighted and knocked. There was no reply. Scattergood pushed open the door and then stepped back suddenly, for within were three individuals of disreputable appearance, and one of them regarded Scattergood over the leveled barrels of a shotgun.

"Come right in and set," invited this individual, and Scattergood, followed by Mr. Bowman, entered. On a table of pine wood, unconcealed, lay three enormous bars of gold.

"Um!" said Scattergood, faintly, and leaned against the wall.

"You would come rammin' in," said the gentleman with the shotgun. "Now I calc'late you got to stay."

Scattergood grinned amiably. "Valyble loaves of bread you got there," he said.

"Gold," said the main, succintly.

"Hain't no mines around here, be there?"

"We hain't sayin'. But that there go'ld come from a mine, all right—some time."

"Calc'late you been robbin' a train or somethin'," said Scattergood, mildly. "Now don't git het up. 'Tain't none of my business. Doin' robbin' for a reg'lar livin'?" he asked, innocently.

"Hain't never done none before——" began one of the men, but his companion directed him to "shut up and stay shut."

"No harm talkin' 's I kin see. We got there fellers here, and here they stay till we git clean off. Kind o' like to tell somebody the joke."

"I'm doggone int'rested," said Scattergood.

The rough individual with the gun laughed loudly. "May's well tell you," he said, raucously. "Me and the boys was in town yestiddy calc'latin' to ship some ferns by express. Went into the office. Agent wa'n't there. Safe was. Open. Ya-as, wide open. We seen three gold chunks inside and nobody around watchin'. Looked full better'n ferns so we jest took a notion to carry 'em out to the wagin and drive off. Now we got it. I'm dummed if I know what to do with it. Heat tell it's wuth $50,000."

Mr. Bowman spoke. "You'll find it mighty hard to dispose of."

"Don't need to worry you."

"Suppose you could sell it for a fair price, cash, and get away with the money?"

"That's our aim."

"Mr. Baines," said Mr. Bowman, "there's money in this if you aren't too particular."

"Hain't p'tic'lar a-tall. How you mean?"

"What would you say to buying this gold—at a reasonable price, I can dispose of it—through channels I am acquainted with. You can put in the money we were going for and I'll put in some more. Ought to show a handsome profit."

"Might nigh double my money, maybe, eh? Figger that? Gimme twict as much to buy stock with."

"Yes, indeed."

"Let's dicker."

"What will you men take to walk away and leave that gold?"

"Forty thousand."

"Fiddlesticks' I'll give you ten—and you're clear of the whole mess."

There was a wrangle. For half an hour the dicker went on, and finally a price of $15,000 was agreed upon. Mr. Bowman was to pay over the money, and Scattergood was to contribute his $5,000 as soon as they got it—for one-third of the profits. The money was paid over; the three robbers disappeared with alacrity, leaving Scattergood and Bowman with the stolen gold.

"We can take it along in the buggy, covered with ferns," said Bowman. "Nobody'll suspect you."

"Be safe as a church," said Scattergood, boldly. "Lug her out."

So they carried the gold to the buggy, covered it snugly with ferns and drove toward the next town, Scattergood talking excitedly of profits and of how much mining stock he could purchase with the money received, and of ample wealth from the transaction. Mr. Bowman smiled with the faint, quiet smile of one whose soul is at peace. Just before they got to town Scattergood suggested that they stop to make sure the gold was completely concealed.

They drove into the woods a few rods and uncovered the treasure. Scattergood gloated over it.

"I've heard tell you kin cut real gold like cheese" he said, and opened his jackknife. With it he hacked off a shaving and held it up to the light.

"Is all gold this here way?" he asked. "Don't look to me to be the same color all the way through. Looks like silver or suthin' inside."

Mr. Bowman snatched the shaving, scrutinized it and uttered language in a loud voice. He snatched Scattergood's knife and tested all three ingots.

"Lead!" he said, savagely. "Nothing but lead! We've been swindled!"

"You mean it hain't gold a-tall?"

"It's lead, I tell you."

"I vum! Them fellers stole lead! And they got off with all your money. Gosh! I'm glad I didn't have none along." His eyes were mirthless and his face vacuous. "Beats all. Never heard tell of nothin' sim'lar."

* * * *

THEY got into the buggy and drove silently into town. Mr. Bowman tried to recover his spirits, but they were at low ebb. He did manage to hint that Scattergood should stand his share of the loss, but in his heart he knew that to be vain. Still, he could get that five thousand dollars for the mining stock. It would be five thousand dollars.

"Anyhow," he said, "you're fortunate. You still can buy the stock and make your pile."

"This here deal," said Scattergood, "has kind of made me figger. 'Taint safe to buy gold chunks till you know they're gold. Likewise 'tain't safe to buy mine stock till you know there's a mine. Calc'late I'll do a mite of investigatin' 'fore I pungle over that five thousand. Where kin I leave you, Mr. Bowman' I'm calc'latin' to drive home from here. Maybe I'll see you later. But I got to investigate."

Mr. Bowman made himself unpleasant for a brief time, but Scattergood was vacuously stubborn. Presently he drove away, leaving Mr. Bowman on the veranda of the hotel, scowling and uttering words of strength and meaning. Mr. Bowman was very unhappy.

Scattergood drove as rapidly as his horse could travel, arriving at Coldriver just after the supper hour. He went directly to his store, which had been left in charge of Mr. Spackles. Three men were waiting there for him. They handed him a leather bag and he satisfied himself that it contained $15,000.

"Much 'bleeged, boys," he said. "Do as much f'r you some day. G'-by."

"Mr. Spackles," he said, "kin you fetch Grandmother Penny over here, right now?"

"Calc'late I kin," said Mr. Spackles, and he proved himself able to keep his word.

"Grandmother Penny," said Scattergood, when she arrived, "you and Mr. Spackles up and made a investment. I been a-lookin' after that investment f'r you—and f'r these other dum fools in town. Best I could do f'r them others was to git their money back—every cent of it. But I took keer to do a mite more f'r you and Mr. Spackles. I got your 500 f'r you—and then I seen a way to git 10,000 more. Here she be. Count it. I don't guess there's any way this here money could be put to better use."

"F'r us? Ten thousand——"

"I'll handle it f'r you. Give you int'rest of 600 a year. You kin marry like you planned, and if your children objects you kin tell 'em to go to blazes. You'll want a place to live. Wa-al, I got twenty acre back of town and a leetle house and furniture. Took it on a deal. You kin move in and work it on shares. Ought to be able to live blamed well."

Grandmother Penny was crying.

"You done all this f'r us, f'r James and me? There hain't no reason f'r it. 'Tain't b'lievable. There hain't no way to say thankee."

"I hain't wantin' you to say thankee, Grandmother Penny. Jest mog along and marry this old coot, and git what joy you kin out of livin'."

Mr. Spackels was inquisitive in addition to being grateful.

"What I want to know," he demanded, "is how you managed it?"

"Oh," said Scattergood, "jest made use of the sayin' about curin' with the hair of the dog that bit you. Figgered a swindler wouldn't never suspect nobody of swindlin' him with one of his own tricks. This here Mr. Baxter, or Mr. Bowman, or whatever his name is, aimed to make a livin' sellin' gold bricks. When I found that there fact out I jest calc'lated he was ripe to do a mite of gold-brick buyin' himself. Which he done."

"Scattergood," said Grandmother Penny, "I'm a-goin' to kiss you."

Scattergood presented his cheek and Grandmother Penny threw her arms around his neck and pressed her lips to his weather-beaten face. He smiled, but as if he were smiling at somebody not present. When they had gone their way to find marriage license and parson he went out on to his piazza and looked up at the moonlit sky.

"Grandma Baines," he said, after a moment, "if you kin see down from where you be, I hope you hain't missin' that I done this f'r you. I was pertendin' all the time that you was Grandmother Penny."

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WHEN BANGS SAW SCATTERGOOD HE STOPPED AND WHISPERED A MOMENT TO HIS COMPANION, WHO NODDED.

BLIND CONGRESSMAN INTRODUCES BILL TO CONSIDER NEW UNIVERSAL CALENDAR

REPRESENTATIVE SCHALL of Minnesota Says This Country Should Adopt the "Liberty Calendar," With Thirteen Months of Twenty-eight Days Each—Extra Day at Beginning of the Year—Last Day of Each Week Would Be Sunday and the First Day of Each Month Would Be Monday—New Month to Be Known as "Vern," Signifying Spring.

NEW Year day and no bright new calendars adorning the den, office or writing desk—what would Father Time do to time then? Can one imagine the convenience of never being compelled to consult the printed page to determine whether July 4 falls on Wednesday or Friday, and whether we can enjoy a long week end celebration on December 25, or merely eat the Christmas goose and run?

Why does one have all this confusion of "thirty days hath September, April, June and November" with August immediately following July and January following December, each boasting thirty-one days, while we skimp February to only twenty-eight? And has it not seemed a cumbersome arrangement when one tried to reckon part of a year's interest on a sum of money, or fractional portion of an employe's wage whose stipend is paid "by the month?"

Such questions have been asked by thinking men for twenty-five years. In this age of efficiency and speed many have recognized that it would be possible to revise the Gregorian calendar, which has been in use since 1582, for twentieth century convenience.

* * * *

BUT it remained for a blind congressman in Washington, Representative Thomas David Schall of Minnesota, to see that the period of world reconstruction was a suitable time for consideration of universal calendar reconstruction. To this end, a few months ago, he introduced a bill before the House of Representatives for an entirely new arrangement of time, to be styled the "liberty calendar."

In spite of his physical affliction, Mr. Schall is a virile, energetic lawyer, who has won his honors by remarkable ability and ambition. Like the hero of a romance, he rose from a homeless, ragged little bootblack of twelve to the enviable distinction of first-prize winner in a state collegiate oratorical contest in Minnesota at eighteen. For the past six years he has been a member of Congress, winning his election in 1920 by a majority of 40,000 votes.

In explaining his reasons for introducing so unprecedented a measure for the consideration of Congress, Mr. Schall says:

"Four years ago the first talk of revising the calendar began in our country among a group of men who had never heard that such a proposition had been suggested abroad. A year later a company of business men of Minnesota convened in Minneapolis and started a definite and systematic movement toward this end. They incorporated an association and elected a competent board of directors. They engaged experts to study different calendar arrangements. J. N. Barnes was the man who drew up the present proposed form.

"After this, to their astonishment, they discovered that France, Switzerland, Denmark, Germany and England had been considering the improvement of the calendar for some time. In fact, it started in Europe about 1906, and in 1908 a bill of that nature was introduced in the British parliament. The discussion continued for several years, until in 1914 a new and somewhat different bill was introduced. Then came the war, and everything was upset for the time being."

* * * *

THE arrangement of the months and days proposed for the new calendar is both simple and convenient, entirely workable and understandable. The 365 days would be divided into thirteen months of twenty-eight days each, the extra day coming at the beginning of the year. This would be called New Year day and would be a legal holiday. It would not be numbered or named as a day of the week. Beginning in 1925, every seventh year it would be observed as Sunday.

The next day would be Monday, January 1. The last day of each week would be Sunday. Thus the first day of every month would be Monday and a given date of any month would always fall on the same day of the week.

The new month, according to the plan of Mr. Schall, is to be inserted between February and March and was first called Liberty. Later it was suggested that this name might not be approved by foreign countries, so the name was changed to Vern, signifying spring.

The additional day every fourth year is provided for just as at present, with the exception that it would be placed between June and July and made a holiday, called Leap Year day. In 1948 and each seventh year thereafter, Leap Year day should be known as Leap Year Sunday.

Section 1 of the bill states that at the beginning of the first day of the year A. D. 1922 the new calendar shall supersede the one in present use. However, it can be begun on any year when the last day of the preceding year falls on Sunday.

"This movement may not become an accomplished fact for several years," remarked Mr. Schall. "But it seems certain that if we can get a new calendar arrangement that will be suitable for all countries it will have universal acceptance."

One's first thought is that the new division would affect the dates of our customary holidays, but with the exception of the 30th of May, Memorial day, the usual dates can be retained. That anniversary is planned for the 13th of May, thus occurring at practically the same time in the year as now, and always on Saturday. Labor day is set for September 8.

Another consideration of greatest importance to business transactions is the quarterly divisions of the year, which we recognize as the first days of January, April, July and October. With the new divisions into even months, this is easily adjusted by dividing the year into four equal parts, so that beginning with the first day of January each quarter would commence with the Monday exactly thirteen weeks after the previous quarter began.

Probably no date in the year holds greater significance or is more difficult to determine by any except high church men, or presents greater variability from year to year, than Easter. By the bill before the House, Good Friday would fall on March 12, and Easter Sunday two days later on March 14, exactly fourteen weeks after the new year began.

Most remarkable of all the innovations afforded by the new calendar proposition is the ease with which one could get through the year comfortably without a calendar.

The present calendar is the result of a gradual evolution from that devised by the ancient Romans, whose calculations were based upon their study of the planets and the sun. They had their three epochs in the month, the Calends, the Nones and the Ides, from which they counted backward to determine given dates. Julius Caesar, in revising this clumsy method, ordered that beginning with January, each alternate month should be composed of thirty-one days. Thus July, named in his honor, had one day more than August, which was named for Augustus. The latter hero, jealous for his own distinction, added a day to August by transferring it from February, which, up to that time, had twenty-nine days. This produced three successive months, each containing thirty-one days, necessitating other changes to make appearances better. And with slight alterations made by Pope Gregory XIII this old Roman calendar has been used by most countries for nearly 340 years.

* * * *

OUR own America can boast of a method of reckoning time which is considered by scientific men to have been the most correct of any adopted by primitive people.

The Mayan Indians of the peninsula of Yucatan invented a remarkable system of heiroglyphic writing based on their astronomical observations by which they recorded events, which was more correct than that of the Julian calendar and nearly as accurate as that of the present Gregorian. They lived probably for several hundred years beginning at the first of the Christian era. They built great cities of stone that denote a degree of wealth and splendor surpassing anything seen elsewhere in the new world.

While we would not by any means consider reverting to the inconvenient form of expressing time which satisfied these ancient natives of our own shores, yet they have set us a precedent in leading the world in a simple, correct, easily computed arrangement of the year.

To quote from Congressman Schall's speech before the House of Representatives: "We have replaced the old-time hand sickle with the modern self-binder, and it will be a sad reflection on the intelligence of this age of telephones, wireless telegraphy and airplanes if we shall not be able to substitute for this cumbersome calendar of the ancients a modern and convenient form."

Harnessing a Volcano.

IN Central Tuscany is a large electric powerhouse that obtains its initial driving power from volcanic heat. In the neighborhood are many cracks in the ground, from which powerful jets of very hot steam spout high into the air. Early experiments in using the steam for driving engines failed commercially, for the borax salts, sulphureted hydrogen and sulphuric acid in the steam, on account of the corrosive action, made necessary frequent repairs. The difficulty has been overcome by applying the steam, not directly, but to a boiler